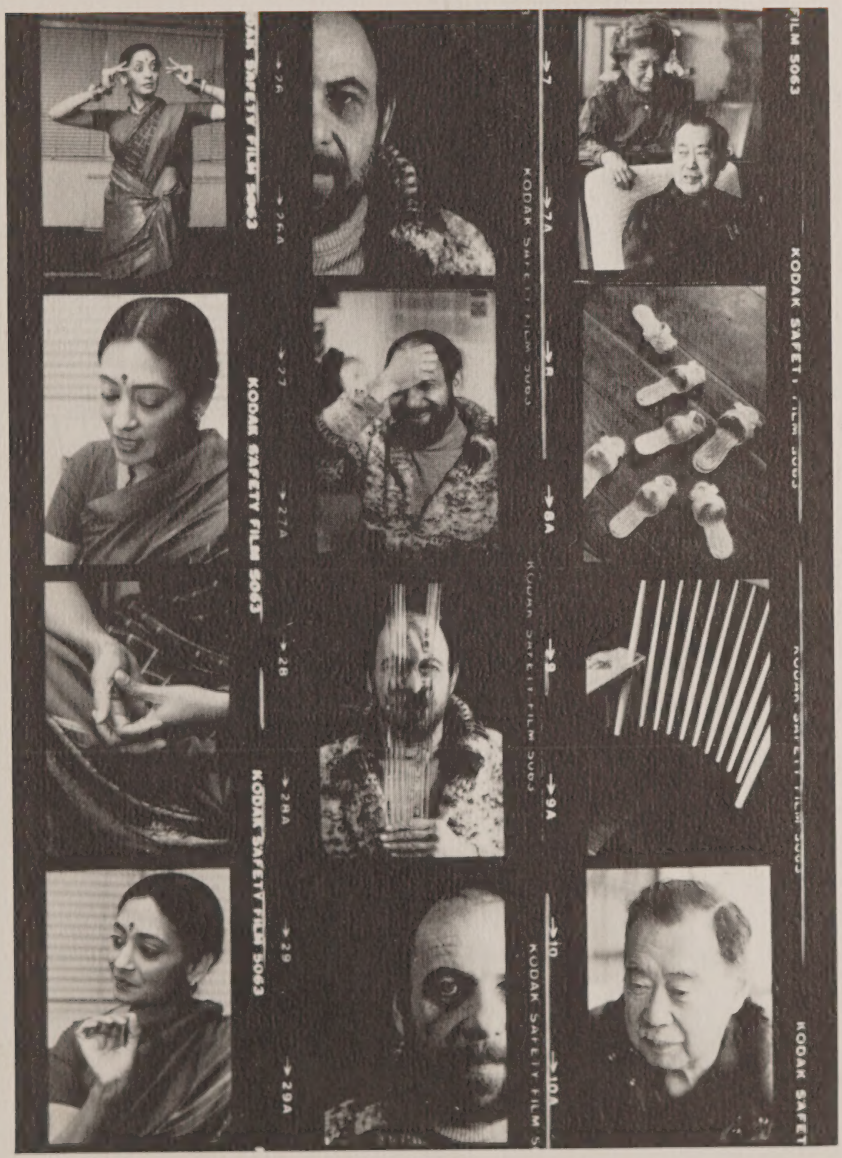
VOLUME 33/NO 3 MARCH

# FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER




Artists Raghupathy, Lambert, and Nakashima

ARTISTS & THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES
is a special issue of Fellowship in Prayer
Volume 33/Number 3/March 1982
©Copyright 1982
by Fellowship in Prayer, Inc.
20 Nassau Street, Suite 250 E
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

Interviews by Paul Griffith and John Glaus
Photographs by Tom Dunham

FELLOWSHIP IN

# PRAYER

## 12 MONTHLY ISSUES $12

☑ **YES!** Start my subscription for 12 monthly issues of *Fellowship in Prayer* for the low rate of just $12. Include my FREE copy of REPORT ON HOLISTIC HEALTH.

Name ☐ Mr. ☐ Mrs. ☐ Ms. _____

Address _____ Apt _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me ☐ Renewal

**FREE** for new subscribers and renewals: *REPORT ON HOLISTIC HEALTH.* 56 pages of interviews with individuals on how they found the way toward integration of body, mind, and spirit.

**MAIL THIS CARD TODAY—POSTAGE IS PAID**

Your first issue will arrive in 3 to 6 weeks. Watch for it.

**IDEAL GIFTS for...**
**Birthdays**
**Holidays**
**Graduation**
**Libraries**
**Students**

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

# BUSINESS REPLY CARD

FIRST CLASS PERMIT NO. 175 PRINCETON, NJ

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

**FELLOWSHIP IN**

# PRAYER

**20 Nassau Street Suite 250 East**
**Princeton, NJ 08540**

# ARTISTS & THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES

GREAT SOULS are never artists, but there have been great artists — Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Keats — who seem to have possessed great souls. And there are great works of art — architecture and sculpture from ancient Egypt, India, China, and Greece, not to mention more contemporary creations like *The Magic Flute*, *Fidelio*, or novels of Jane Austen, Dostoevski, and Proust — in which the artist's vision passes beyond the delightful, the impressive, or the meaningful to become what we experience as the spiritual . . . . It is hard to discuss. Those who make the most sense about it, of course, are artists themselves. Thus this special issue featuring painter Saul Lambert, from Princeton, New Jersey, dancer Sudharani Raghupathy, from India, and woodworker George Nakashima, from New Hope, Pa., whose designs have been admired now for years.

# SUDHARANI RAGHUPATHY: DANCER

*THE MORNING had not announced itself auspiciously. The clouds which had been gathering since the previous evening now deposited rain in great sheets, pelting nature with a vengeance. The moisture had condensed on the window and ran in rivulets through which could be seen the mist that was forming on the roads. The lack of visibility would make the trip hazardous.*

*The trip to New York along Route 1 and up the New Jersey Turnpike turned out to be worse than we had anticipated. We now found ourselves locked bumper to bumper with the rest of the commuters. The weather had not let up and the windshield wipers could barely keep the rain off. The tardiness of our departure, the traffic, the weather, and the lack of coffee kept the conversation subdued. The tension was palpable and the general attitude towards this interview was complete: it simply was not going to work.*

*Our hopes rose somewhat as we entered New York, only to be dashed as we inched our way through grid-lock, red lights, and pedestrians. We were nowhere near our destination as it became exceedingly clear that we were going to be significantly late for the interview. Then, a few more rights, a few more lefts, a gentle lurch forward and a screech of tires, we peered from the car; we had arrived. Hastily we ushered ourselves into the lobby of an unpretentious building and announced ourselves to the doorman. He called our person on the telephone and allowed us to proceed. As we walked down the long corridor and approached the apartment, the nervous tension had reached its peak. We were riding on the crest of pure anticipation. The door had been left ajar, we pushed it open, and looked in.*

*Standing in the middle of the* salon, *was what appeared to be a princess conjured from an ancient Indian legend. As our eyes focused to the light, we were better able to appreciate the figure which stood before us in the glitter of a gold and saffron colored* sari. *She stood there for what seemed eternity, poised; then, clasped her hands together, placed them to her forehead, and bowed in the traditional Indian gesture of salutation. With the simple and gracious movement of her hand she bade us take a place on the divan. We did so in silence. We realized that the penetrating gaze of her almond-shaped eyes had transfixed us, as sure as three birds had been plucked and were now roasting slowly over an open fire. If, until this moment, in our muted state there had been any anxiety, it was quickly dispelled by the enchantment that seemed to cast a spell around the room. Suddenly a flame appeared to flicker in her eyes, she gestured with her hand, and all our fears and tensions dissipated like mist before the sun; some enigmatic power released us from our silence. We snapped out of our* reverie *and our questions were met by the soft eloquence of an extremely competent mind. . . .*

**FIP:** It has been said that the dances of India — as a form of expression — are instrumental in understanding the fabric of spiritual and religious life in India. Could you elaborate on this for us?

**SUDHARANI:** India is a country of many myths and legends. To understand India is to understand her epics and stories, both great and small. But it is not only through dance, not only through music that the history of India has arrived to the present day. Life in India — the cultural, the artistic, and the social — has always revolved around her temples. They were and still are to this day the focul point of those three aspects of life. The great temples of India contain, both on their exteriors and in their interiors, the stories of India. They portray the most essential parts of our heritage. People would come as they do today to the temples to hear the epics and stories and to watch the dances. It is as a dancer that I am most qualified and privileged to express the living history of my country. I have been invited to the United States by the Secretary General of the United Nations to dance on Human Rights Day. The dance which I will be performing is a special dance that I have choreographed which pertains to human rights. The performance itself is composed of a dance and a narrative. The narration will be done in Sanskrit, and I have provided a translation in English so that the audience will be able to follow and understand. But I have not done this by myself, because I believe that as a dancer I am a vehicle of communication, a medium. I am simply the agent through which the idea is communicated to the audience. I shall take the idea, which I have translated into dance-form, and convey it to the audience.

The idea for the dance is inherently bound to my own philosophy which is basically Theosophy. What transpires is that there is an illusion within the idea. My function as a dancer is to create, visually through movement, the illusion so that the audience may react to what it sees. They in turn provide me with reaction which is sustaining and reciprocal. The idea for this dance was discussed with many scholars and religious leaders, prior to my choreography and before the text was written.

The idea was to convey the purpose of life and to show the unity of religions. To show that the teachings of Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Jainism and Hinduism had one commom purpose, one main endeavor, but that they have their own ways of teaching that common purpose.

In Hinduism there are remarkably beautiful lines of scripture which convey this very idea. As I begin to dance the dance which will be performed at the United Nations, the opening lines of the narrative will convey that idea of unity. They are taken from the Hindu scriptures and express the commonality of religions as the rains which fall from the sky to the earth, beginning in small rivulets and going into streams and into rivers and ultimately into the ocean. So all faiths, beliefs, and the religions of mankind lead to one Supreme Being. And that Supreme Being, whatever one wishes to call him, is hidden in every living creature. He is omnipresent and is within every soul. If each person were to do his or her duty, according to the capacity within that person, then there would be peace. Universal brotherhood and compassion are the threads which bind

man to man in his quest for peace. And this is the theme which is expressed in the dance supplemented by the text, a theme possessing the human right to live and let live, so let there be peace.

**FIP:** Sudharani, can you tell us how and when you established your beginnings as a dancer?

**SUDHARANI:** I would very much like to do that. Unfortunately, I do not know exactly when or why I began. My mother has told me — and I have seen photographs of myself in costume and on the stage dancing when I was three. This was not in a professional capacity. Nonetheless, I was dancing at that age. After that, I began to study with various masters, and some of them were very great teachers. It was very hard work and to this day I still consider myself a pupil, even though I now have a school in Madras where I teach dancing.

**FIP:** How was the school founded?

**SUDHARANI:** When I came to the United States and studied at Randolph Macon College in Lynchburg, Virginia, I was also teaching the senior class in dance. I had studied the Martha Graham technique in modern dance under Eleanor Strugart and I had master classes under Ellen McGee and Jose Limon. I was not a modern dancer due to the fact that I had been a philosophy/sociology graduate at Mysore University in India. However, with my previous background in classical Indian dancing coupled with the instruction that I had received in the Martha Graham technique, they asked me to teach. So I began to teach the senior class in dance, and the more I taught, the more I learned. My dancing was evolving by teaching.

When I returned to India, I founded the Sree Bharatalaya School of Dance in Madras. *Bharata* is a word of many meanings. *Bha* signifies power. You could take it to mean the power of expression. Without expression there can be no dance. *Ra* comes from the word *raga* which means melody and *tala* means the rhythm. So all these woven together — power, melody and rhythm — gives you dance.

After the school was founded and the children began to enroll, I began to teach them and devoted my time to them. Slowly I discovered that my intelligence was being sharpened. I found that I had to prepare very carefully for the presentation of the lessons. I began to perceive that each child is different, an entity unlike any other. I saw that each child has a particular mannerism and that certain characteristics are more pronounced in some than in others. For example, some may be pigeon-toed, some may have a particular gait. Then I discovered, as I gained proficiency in my teaching techniques, that two distinct, yet complementary aspects of the dance techniques had evolved. Firstly, that the dance itself was a performance of a visual art and that it was glamorous to look at. Secondly, I realized that dance had therapeutic values which could be exploited. A person could become, not only more beautiful by improving their carriage and posture, but also healthier. With the children that

were attending classes I had the opportunity of putting these ideas into practice. In the Bharatalaya style of dance there are many movements for all the different parts of the body. There are exercises for the feet, knees, legs, arms, hands, wrists, fingers, back, mouth, face, eyebrows and eyes, for every part of the body. In the past they used to place drops of castor oil in the eyes and then do the eye exercises. Today we still do the exercises, but without the castor oil. The ocular muscles begin to develop and slowly minor eye defects can be corrected. I had also noticed that there were children who had been struck by polio, and that with the proper exercise so as to enhance the blood circulation and muscle tone they would eventually improve, slightly perhaps but nonetheless they would improve. I also found that it was extremely important to develop and stress the necessity of a straight back. How difficult it is to correct that which is already wrong, but how much easier it is to learn something correctly from the beginning. However, this was not always successful in the correction of physical defects. There were those children who had such severe disabilities that they could not be corrected. Yet those children, who despite their physical ailments, attempted to improve, did register significant changes in attitude towards their disabilities. So through my teaching I learned that there was as much emphasis to be placed on the creation of beauty as there was to be to be gained in using dance as a therapeutic tool.

**FIP:** Your classical dancing background is based on a tradition which stems back for thousands of years. Are you trying to extend the scope of your tradition by using the Martha Graham technique?

**SUDHARANI:** The age of Bharatalaya goes back for thousands of years. To attempt to fix a date is futile, it would be as well to ask how old is Krishna or any of the other Indian gods. It is impossible to fix a date for its beginning, everything is approximate and everything is relative. To affix an exact date for the beginning of one thing is to deny the end of something else and the period of transition. The element of doubt is always apparent, even on the subject of history. We have an idea of the whole thing, but is it definite? There is always a persisting doubt. For example, perhaps there was a king in the 5th century BC, let us say that he was an enlightened man and interested in art, he may have commissioned certain artists to execute the sculptures on the temple that he was building, but that does not mean that they were the only artists available. Those artists provided us with an idea of what man was like at the time, but because this is all that posterity has left can we believe that those artists monopolized the presentation of the idea of what man was like? So I began to conceptualize the same way for dance. Because there are so many dancers, so many artists, it is natural to assume that each one is different, each one is an individual. When I began to think about the age when the Bharatalaya style of dance began, I realized that it too had changed, simply for the reason that people change and that people are different. When I arrived in the United States, the jazz that was played and the rock-'n-roll that was danced to was different than it is today. The people changed, so the dancing changed. So if that happened to rock-'n-roll in the space of a few years, can you begin to understand what hap-

pened to the Bharatalaya style in the space of a few millenia? What society no longer uses passes into the mist of oblivion. What society keeps remains and is transformed and becomes more and more popular. So the dancing that I am doing has an heritage which can be traced back into history, but its style has changed considerably, and has adapted itself to the demands imposed on it by society.

So to the question that you have asked concerning the tradition of a style of dance which is thousands of years old and how I have been affected by a style which is modern may be answered in the following way. When I began studying the Martha Graham technique, I began to see that there were similar lines of development, the same common denominators existed. I mentioned that the back was very important and that as much emphasis was placed on posture in the Martha Graham technique as in the Bharatalaya style. In the Indian tradition they stressed the techniques of breathing which are known as *contractions*, they are also very important in our yoga. Similarly we are trained to present ourselves with a straight back, and when I learned correct posture we had to wear waistbands that were tightened until we could not bend. It was extremely painful. As I mentioned, the straight back is universal in dancing. All of these points were similar and then I learned that Martha Graham had studied yoga.

In the Graham technique we were led through the basic styles of ballet, positions, jumps, etc. In the Graham technique there was much more pointing and flexing. Now these are not similar to the Bharatalaya style. Ours is more of a style of landing solidly on one's feet. In the Indian style we assume more of a *pli* position. By having had the opportunity of studying modern dance, not only was I able to determine common points I was also able to give an intelligent interpretation to my own style.

Now, in retrospect, I can see that I have been fortunate to have received the gift of being a dancer and to have been able to analyze the Bharatalaya style in conjunction with the synthesis which came from the Martha Graham technique. I feel honored that a higher power has allowed me to reach an understanding of the gift of creation in being a dancer.

•

On the following pages are photographs of Sudharani Raghupathy explaining the dance she was commissioned to perform on Human Rights Day at the U.N.

By interlocking her hands, Sudharani evokes wings of a bird in flight.

Sudharani's spread palm and extended fingers reveal a bird at rest on lotus.

In the blink of an eye, her hands change — and a cockatoo perches on branch.

Sudharani recites from U.N. dance: "Over the nations blows a storm of pas-

sion and hate and strife. O, for friendship among the faiths and people."

"Is there not among religions a unity of aspiration? Are not religions the

differentiations of One Supreme consciousness, reflections of one light?"

"The paths to the Supreme Being are infinite as the stars in the heavens.

Why this competition among religions and nations? Are they not a unity?

"Religion in its highest form is ananda — the joy of fellowship — bliss.

Another name for religion is unity, harmony, and love – one humanity."

"The Supreme Being is hidden in every creature, omnipresent in every soul.

If each person were to do his or her duty, then there would be peace. . . .

"Brotherhood and compassion bind man to man," says Sudharani Raghupathy.

# SAUL LAMBERT: PAINTER

*Saul Lambert's home is located on the edge of Princeton's suburbs, which, when we visited him last winter, were still, brown, gray, and cold. His studio is a big, one-room garage with plenty of storage space for his oversized canvases, and he makes you welcome there with a cup of instant coffee and an open manner and ready laugh. In person, his seriousness is not at all belied by the jive vocabulary recorded on our tapes.*

**SAUL:** I grew up with my mother and grandmother in the South Bronx. I'm one of the few survivors. The rest are in jail or dead. My building's rubble — I lived in various places around 149th Street, Third Avenue, Southern Boulevard, Fremont. It was a pretty rough neighborhood. I mean, there were gangs, and you had to belong to a gang and carry a switchblade. I got cuts on my arm. I knew I had to get out of there. There was a certainty about that. It wasn't the danger that bothered me so much as the circumscribed quality of the life.

Once I got to be fourteen or fifteen and started really reading books and seeing certain movies, I realized that a lot of kids were getting out of that life through athletics, boxing or baseball or whatever, but that my key to getting out had to be art. Art was what I always did ever since I can remember. Ever since I was a little kid, I drew. I didn't know how you did it, but it was done by people and I was going to be a people some day, so that was what I was going to do. It was as simple as that.

Anyway, I wasn't the kind of kid that was looking for a spiritual life. I grew up in a very orthodox Jewish family — observation of the dietary laws, the whole business of prayer and all of that jazz. There was a great degree of hyprocrisy. My mother who presented herself as being pious was really a hypocrite in the little things she did every day — the rules, the regulations, the laws. I saw it, but I didn't dare criticize it because one didn't criticize one's mother in my day, anyway. Besides, if I confronted her — and initially I did — she would find some rationale for why she did what she did and it would make sense since she was a grownup and had all the power and the knowledge. I accepted it as I accepted a lot of things.

I accepted that I was inferior because I didn't do well at school. I never paid attention. My mother was called to school constantly. The remark was always "He's a bright child, but he seems to be dreaming all the time." The truth was I just hated school. I hated any kind of system. Say to me I have got to be here at this time or there at that time or do this and now do that — and I dig in my heels — and no. I've been that way all my life.

The spiritual thing — which I equated with organized religion — was just

thrown out the window. It was completely lost on me. I gave no thought at all to it. As far as I was concerned, I was an atheist, God didn't exist, injustice was rampant all over the face of the earth, if there was a God who allowed such things, I didn't want any part of Him. I should thank Him? For what? I became a cynic. I was very arrogant.

**FIP:** You became a well-known illustrator: The most recent of your work was the front cover for *Newsweek*?

**SAUL:** Yes, I have been freelancing for over twenty years and it has been fine and I have done well, got all kinds of honors. It has treated me very well. I raised a family, which is pretty good, considering that I didn't have a steady job and nobody told me what to do. I was a professional. I did my assignments, stuck to a commitment when I made one, and prided myself on never being late for a deadline.

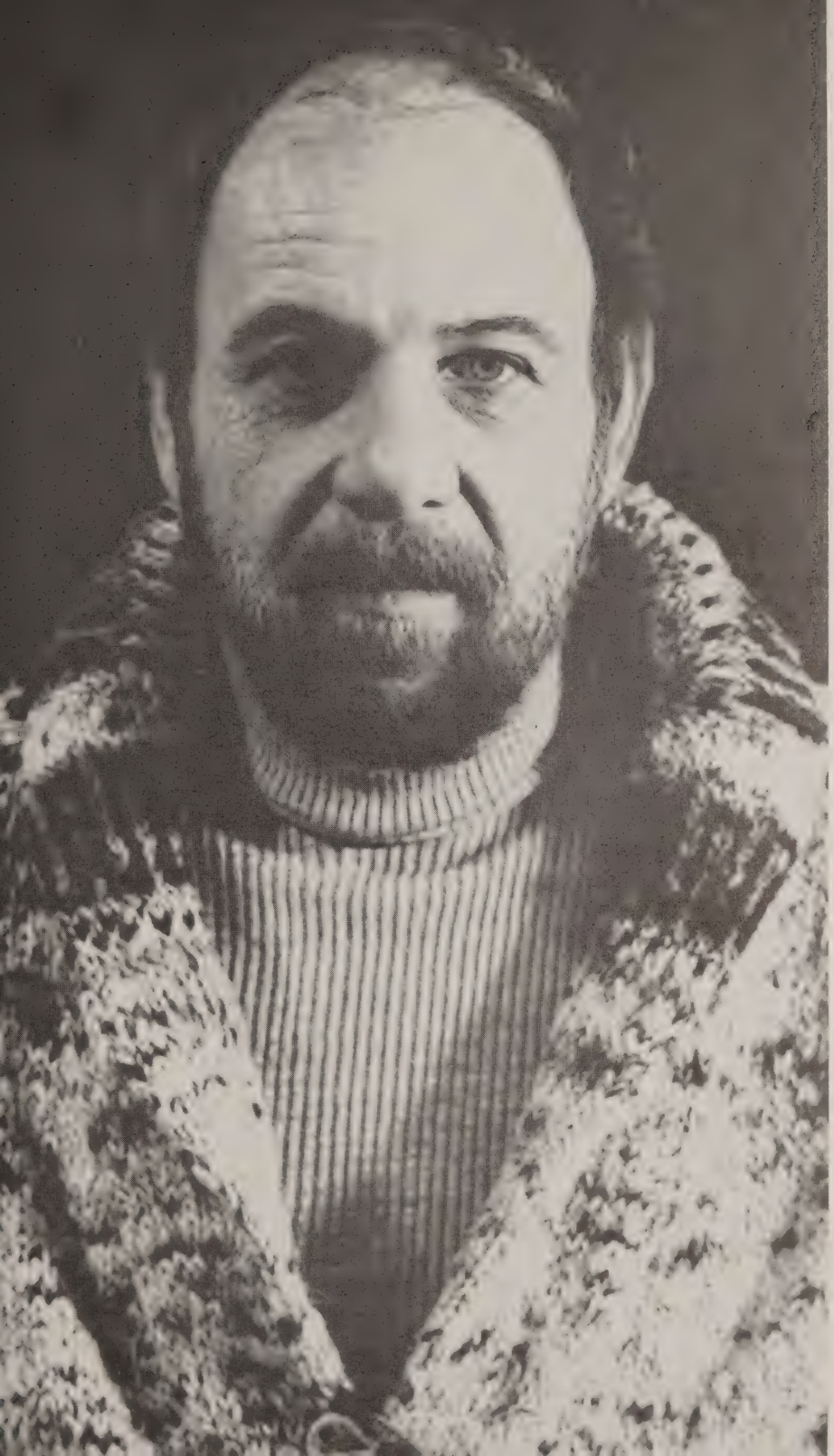
All through the years, while I was being an illustrator, the urge to paint never left. I wished it would. I felt I was doing a perfectly legitimate kind of job, that it was okay to be an illustrator. But the urge wouldn't leave me. I finally realized there had to be what was called dedication, old-fashioned dedication — that you had to lay yourself down on the altar and dedicate yourself and that was it because it was the only way it could be done. I dreamed of doing it but couldn't find a way of doing it. I had to make a living.

I had my first one-man show when I was twenty-one. That was in Israel about a year and a half after independence. I went there because I wanted to immerse myself in a completely different culture in a completely different area of the world. I stayed overseas for about two years. I got very emotionally involved and changed my status from tourist to immigrant. I wanted to see what it felt like to be an immigrant. So there I sat — in those cruddy little rooms — among all the Yemenites and Iraqis and all those little tiny shriveled black people. I sat there — a lanky, gawky, white man — an immigrant — and I loved it, it was great.

But then suddenly the army called me, in fact two armies called me simultaneously, the American and the Israeli — and why not? I was both an American citizen and an Israeli citizen. You can imagine how loved you can be when two armies want you.

Meanwhile, my mother was putting on a whole lot of pressure with letters from America, and I decided it was time to go back and go into the army in America, which I did during the Korean thing. And came out of that and went to lower East Side which is now called the East Village to a coldwater flat for twelve and a half bucks a month and painted and starved literally.

I got a job as messenger boy for a commercial art studio — Diamond Art, which was a real nuts-and-bolts operation, where, believe me, I learned a lot more than I would have in any classroom in art school. I spent a little time there, worked up a portfolio, got married to a copywriter from J. Walter Thompson — she was also a writer — and got our little apartment in Greenwich Village. She was a bit of a maverick, and after about a year or so we went



to Italy and lived for eight months in Florence and then a couple of months in Majorca. I was drawing and painting, and she was writing. But the money ran out and we came back again and I announced I was never going to work for anybody ever again. She blanched, but she went back to work and supported me for six months or so and then I began to click for some reason, things started to work for me. And pretty soon I was earning enough for her to quit and become just a writer. We moved to the East Side — Eighty-first between Park and Madison — and turned into one of those upwardly mobile young couples who are going places. I tried to freelance and paint at the same time. I'm very good at self-discipline. I won't have anybody else disciplining me, but I can do it myself, which is an essential ingredient if you're going to be a freelancer because people depend on you.

Then I had a one-man show in New York, which didn't work out, and the kids came, and I decided to leave painting altogether and just try to be a freelancer. We left New York and moved into a barn in Hopewell and eventually into Princeton. Then the split came — and I moved to where I am now in order to be near the children, I am very fierce in my devotion to the children. Then, about two summers ago, the woman I'd been married to died, and my mother died, and the woman I had been seeing split with me, and my children were leaving, and I suddenly found that I was totally alone again, totally. I just looked around this studio, which was just about completed at the time, and said, 'Wow, this is it!' I had no more real financial obligations. It doesn't take much being a bachelor, not after being used to supporting a family. You know the story about the rabbi and the poor man in the crowded house? The poor man went to the rabbi and said, 'My God, we live in this one little shack, I and my wife and my seven children. It's so tight, we're all so crowded, I can't bear it, there's no privacy, no place to rest, no place to be quiet, no place to. . . .' The rabbi looked at him and said, 'Do you have a cow?' 'Yes.' 'Well, bring the cow into the house and come back next week.' So, when he came back the next week, the rabbi said, 'How is it?' 'Oh, my God, you wouldn't believe. It was bad before, now it's terrible. My God, nobody can move, not even the cow, nobody can sleep.' The rabbi said, 'Do you have a goat?' 'Yes, I have a goat.' 'Well, bring the goat into the house and come back again next week.' This goes on week after week, and when everything is inside the poor man's house — the cow and the goat and the chickens and everything — the rabbi tells him to empty his house. So, when everything is out except the poor man and his wife and seven children, he smiles and says, 'God, it's marvelous. It's like a palace in there!' It's all relative, you know. It becomes very easy when you understand the relationship of things. So, at this point, I decided to leave the commercial stuff except now and then when I need to pay a bill, but all the rest of the time I have been painting.

I walked into my studio here and almost forced myself to work. I liked working, I liked the feel of it, but I didn't have the excitement, the feeling of 'Oh, I want to do this, yeah, yeah!' That feeling wasn't there. I got frightened and went to my sponsor and talked to him and he said, 'Well, it could be that your new work will come out of what is happening inside of you.' Before this,

my work was — more or less — social commentary.

**FIP:** This was when your painting began to take off?

**SAUL:** Yes, I was very involved at that time with the rediscovery of some kind of spirituality. I came to realize that the thing that fed my art or talent, whatever you want to call it, was of a spiritual nature. It didn't come from tangible things. It came from some kind of sense of something — what, I still don't know for sure. Nobody knows.

I tried to analyze it. I asked myself precisely what it was that was happening to me. I realized I was trying to get through to another dimension. Not a dimension in layers, but a dimension that's there all the time even when I'm not tuned in to it. It was a process of getting through to something. Visually, I thought in terms of a crack of penetration. Penetration because I'd gotten a glimpse. Something happened to me at a certain point. One morning I was just standing out on the lawn. The trees were around and the outbuildings. And suddenly I felt the breeze on my face — the breeze that had been blowing all along which suddenly, for some reason, I felt. I felt the pressure of the wind on my cheeks, just that amount. I could feel it. I could have measured it. The trees around me looked different. The leaves were still green, but a different quality of green. The air was clear, but a different, intense clarity which is hard to describe. It was as if my vision had always been blurred and now, for this brief instant, had come into focus. I don't know how long it lasted. It couldn't have been more than a couple of seconds, but something happened, and I walked in. I thought about it many times afterwards. It was an intuition, a glimpse of something I couldn't deny. Maybe two thousand brain cells exploded simultaneously in my head at that point. It was like when I read Huxley in *The Doors of Perception.* He talks about seeing red as he had never seen it before. But I'd gotten that information, so I started to play around with that kind of visual image of breaking through, of cutting through to another dimension, and edges started preoccupying me.

**FIP:** Visually?

**SAUL:** Yes, with me it translates itself into a visual image — metaphysical, abstract things. So I started playing around with edges and hiding things. And I hadn't thought about what my sponsor had told me until I was into it. 'My God, there it is!' I said. The subject that now involved me was a transformation of what was happening to me.

The art I do now is all about what is happening to me spiritually. In a sense it's almost a graphic record of it. It's like keeping notes of a diary except that instead of doing it verbally, I do it with abstract forms and shapes that are very personal symbols. I used to approach my painting, my work, from a highly physical point of view. Look at what I did, hey! How about that?

When I sit down and do a piece of work, I get what are called 'ideas.' Where do they come from? My receptives are receiving certain signals.

Something happens, something goes on, the machine cooks. The energy that activates the machine is quite mysterious. I can call it 'spiritual.' It doesn't matter. It's something.

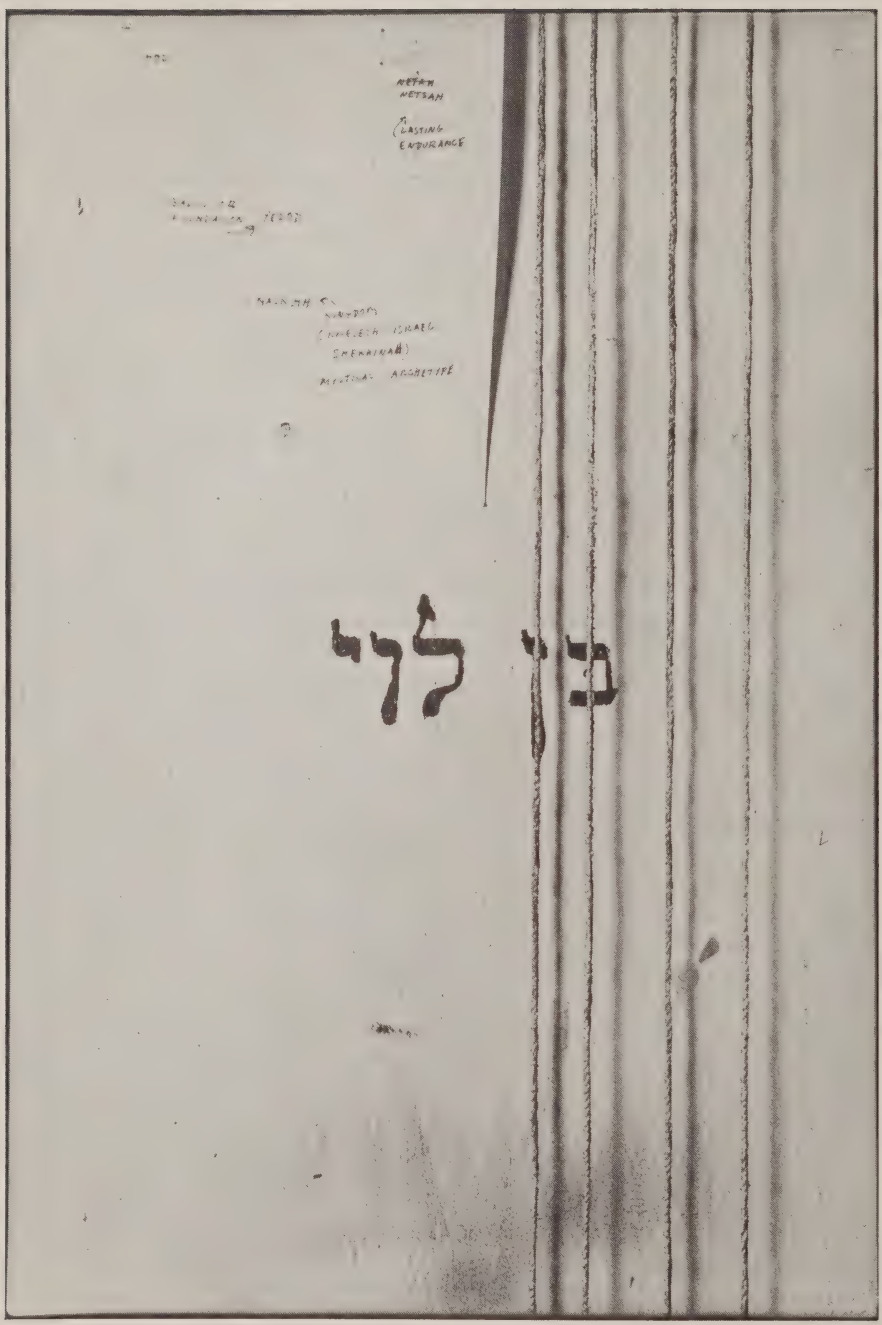
I came to realize I am a sort of receptacle — like the radio over there. I receive these signals and process them through my mechanism and out come these paintings. I feel as if I have a partner who is sending me these signals. It's no longer egotistical. I'm just a processor. That's all I do — process the signals — and that is a great feeling because in a way I'm not the one who's responsible, my partner is.

He sends me lots of messages I don't understand. That's my fault — my inability to take the message and put it into some context that makes sense. A lot of times I'm clumsy at it. A lot of times I succeed. When I finish a painting, I say, 'Thanks a lot. That's a pretty good one we just did.'

I started with spirituality. I have always been attracted to Zen. I liked the Zen philosophy, metaphysics. It made sense to me — not rational sense, but real sense. I read some and went from spirituality to mysticism, which is becoming more and more the main out, and said, 'Well, instead of Zen, why not go to something you already know something about?' I started to read up on Jewishness — in particular, the Kabbalah, which I'm into now.

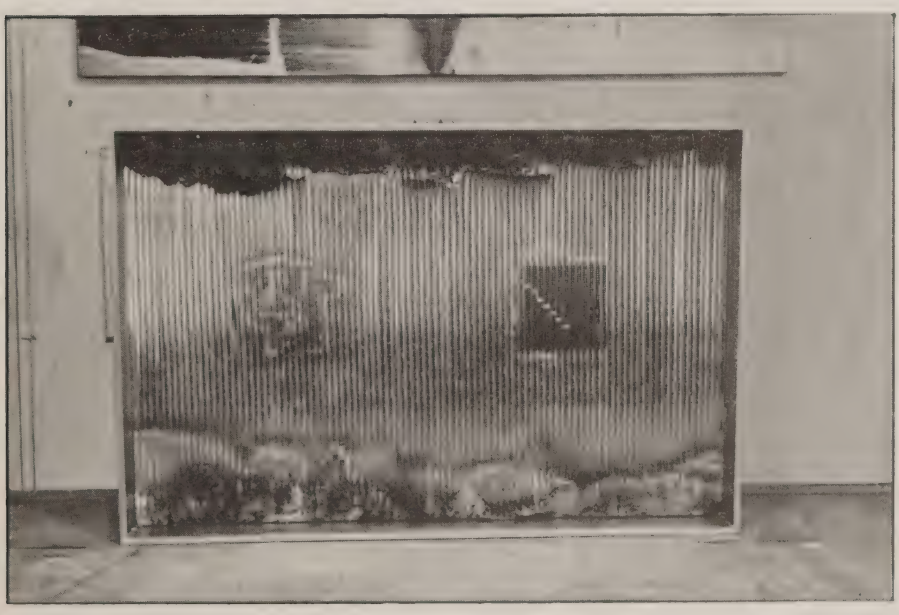
It's a huge mystery to me. What I do know is that, like the alchemists, like any mystical or semi-mystical sect, the Kabbalists have methods or formulae for getting to a certain place. They all do. The Hindus have their mantras and their chanting, and the Tibetans the prayer-wheel, which is kind of mesmerizing. Kabbalists use what I think of as a Dada approach. Dada are things that are cut out of context and placed into another absurd one. The Kabbalists say any holy scripture is holy in and of itself, that even each letter of the text is holy, each symbol. So the physical properties of the letter are holy — it's almost like 'the medium is the message' sort of thing. They would take the text, break the words up into syllables, and mix up the syllables so that it would be practically jibberish and start reciting the jibberish over and over. Maybe it's a little bit like talking in tongues. The whole idea is to remove the rational. If you've got words, you're going to make rational connections. If you don't have words, you're not going to make rational connections. If you don't have words, you can penetrate the barrier into another dimension. It's scarey. The Kabbalists also deal with parables and riddles — unanswerable questions. It takes you out of the ordinary realm. That intrigues me, and I use whatever I can from these things — whatever grabs me I try to incorporate into my language. I have gone deeper and deeper into that. I'm very curious to know what these people have discovered. I know there are certain things I don't know and I'd like to find out about them if I can — I mean, I may not be able to.

In a sense I am becoming more ethnic. But it's going beyond that. A need has arisen in me to identify myself with a history I can really grab onto and hold onto as an anchor or something. In a sense I've gone back not to the group I came up with but another. This is my own group now and I see what I can discover.

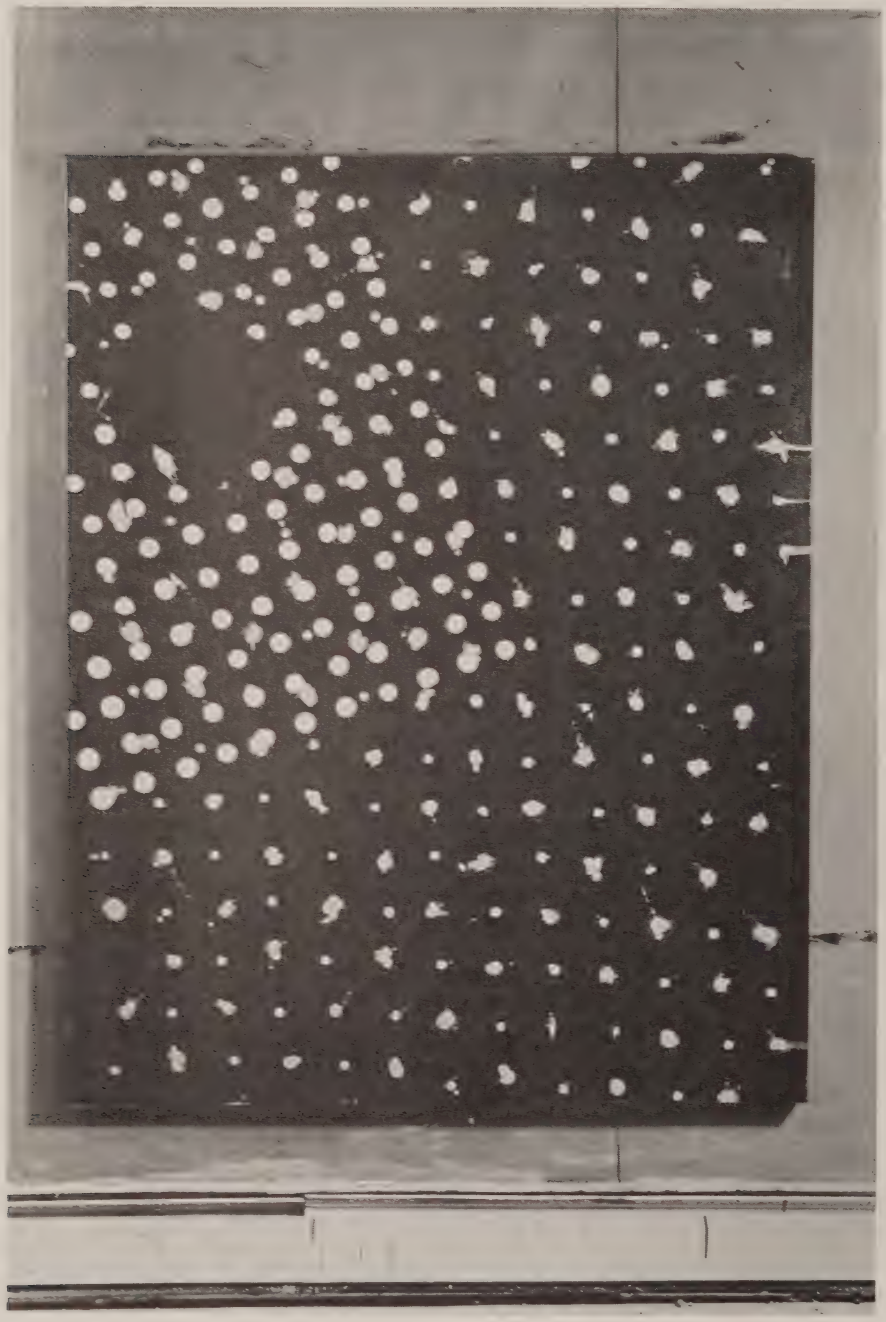

NETSAH
NETSAH
(LASTING
ENDURANCE
MALKUTH
(MALKOTH
(MALKETH ISRAEL
SHEKHINAH)
MYSTICAL ARCHETYPE

Ornamenting a wall in Saul Lambert's studio are three items: the Kabbalah, the name of "Ben Levi," and silvered plumb lines. Each is representative of "mysteries hidden since the beginning of time," according to Saul. All pertain to inner richness of the immutable truth that he has endeavored to express in his canvases. In these the "edges" of the material universe somehow unfold in perfect order and harmonize in symmetry and balance. The metallic brightness of the colors, and the fixity of points and lines, give rise to a sense of astral and terrestrial bodies in motion and, though photographed in black and white, evoke a spiritual apotheosis.

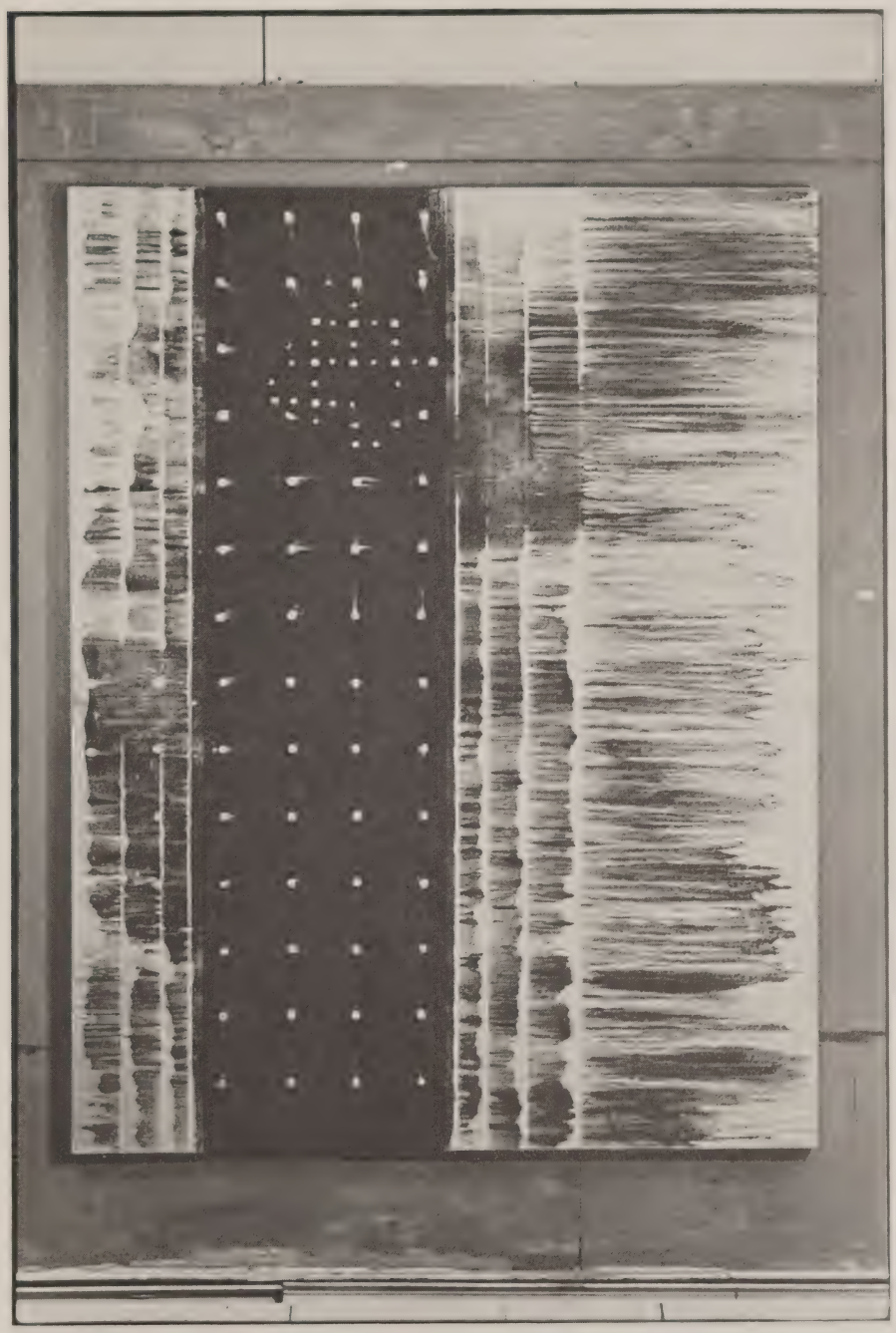
The painting below and those reproduced on the following pages are from Saul Lambert's most recent series. They are untitled, yet the word he used to describe them is "intimations." As captions for them, we have used quotations from Saul showing where the paintings come from and where he is now.



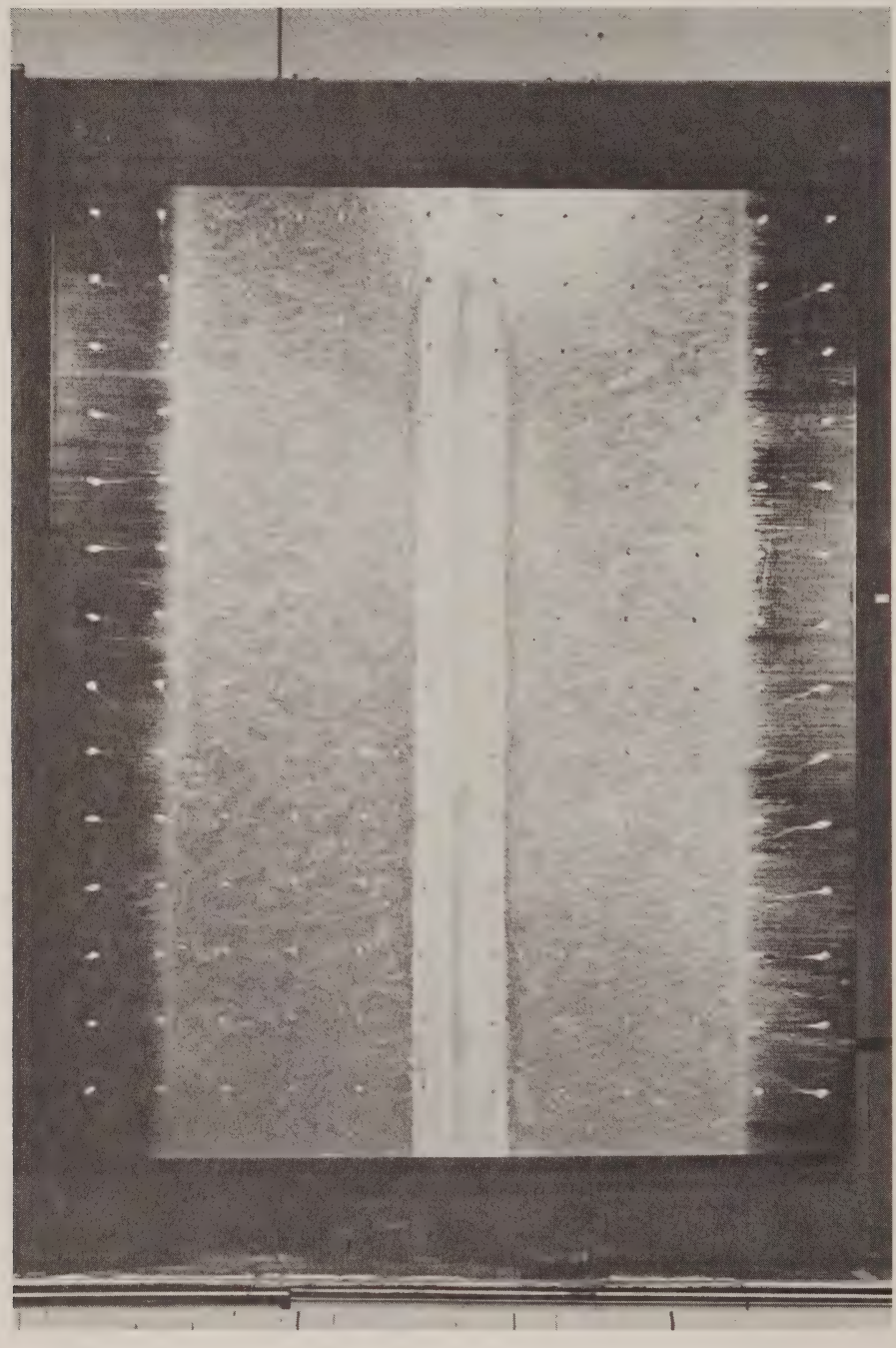
"At first it speaks from behind a veil," Saul Lambert says of his painting.



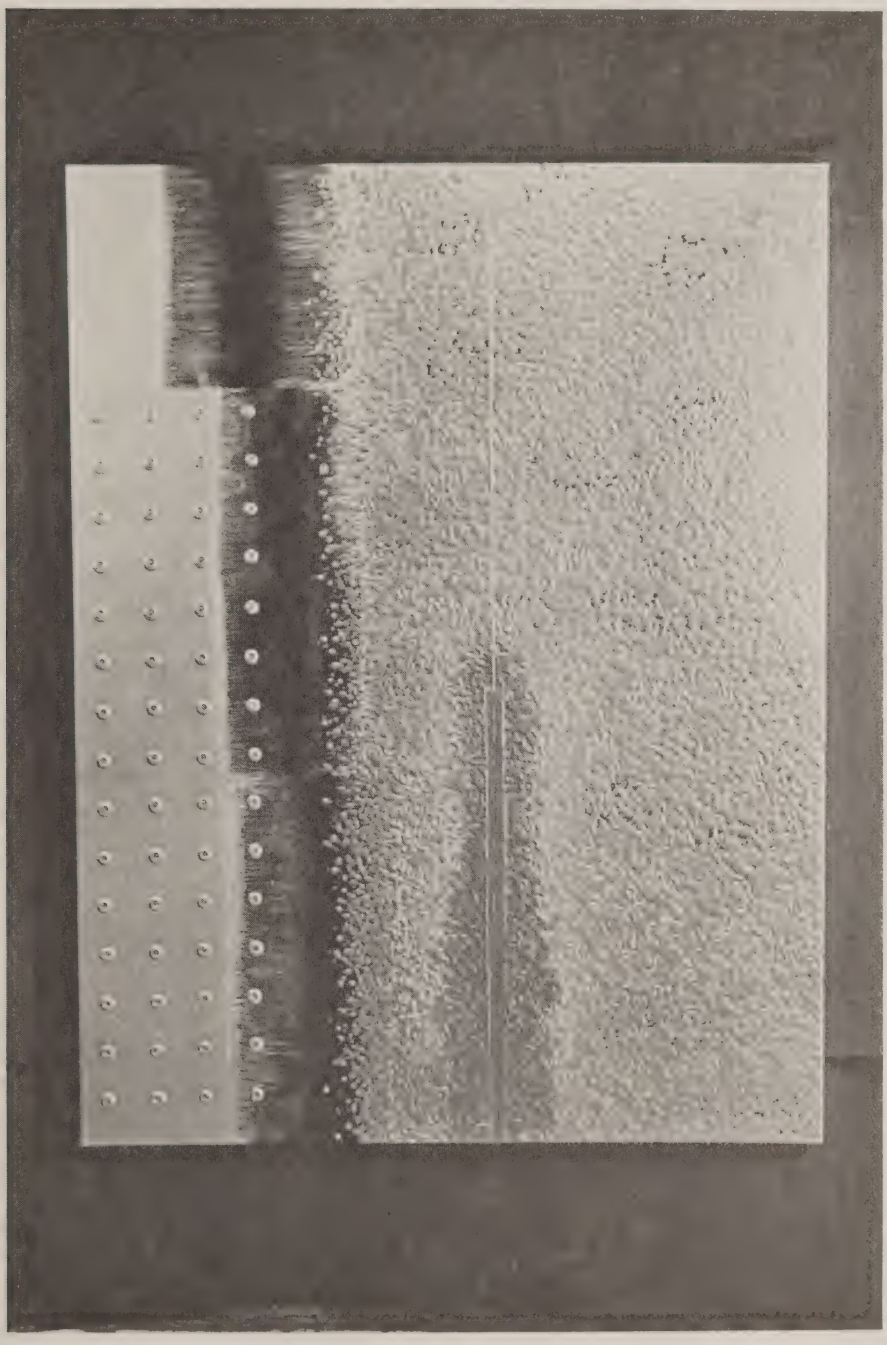
"My work's effects on the soul," he says, "don't depend on being understood."



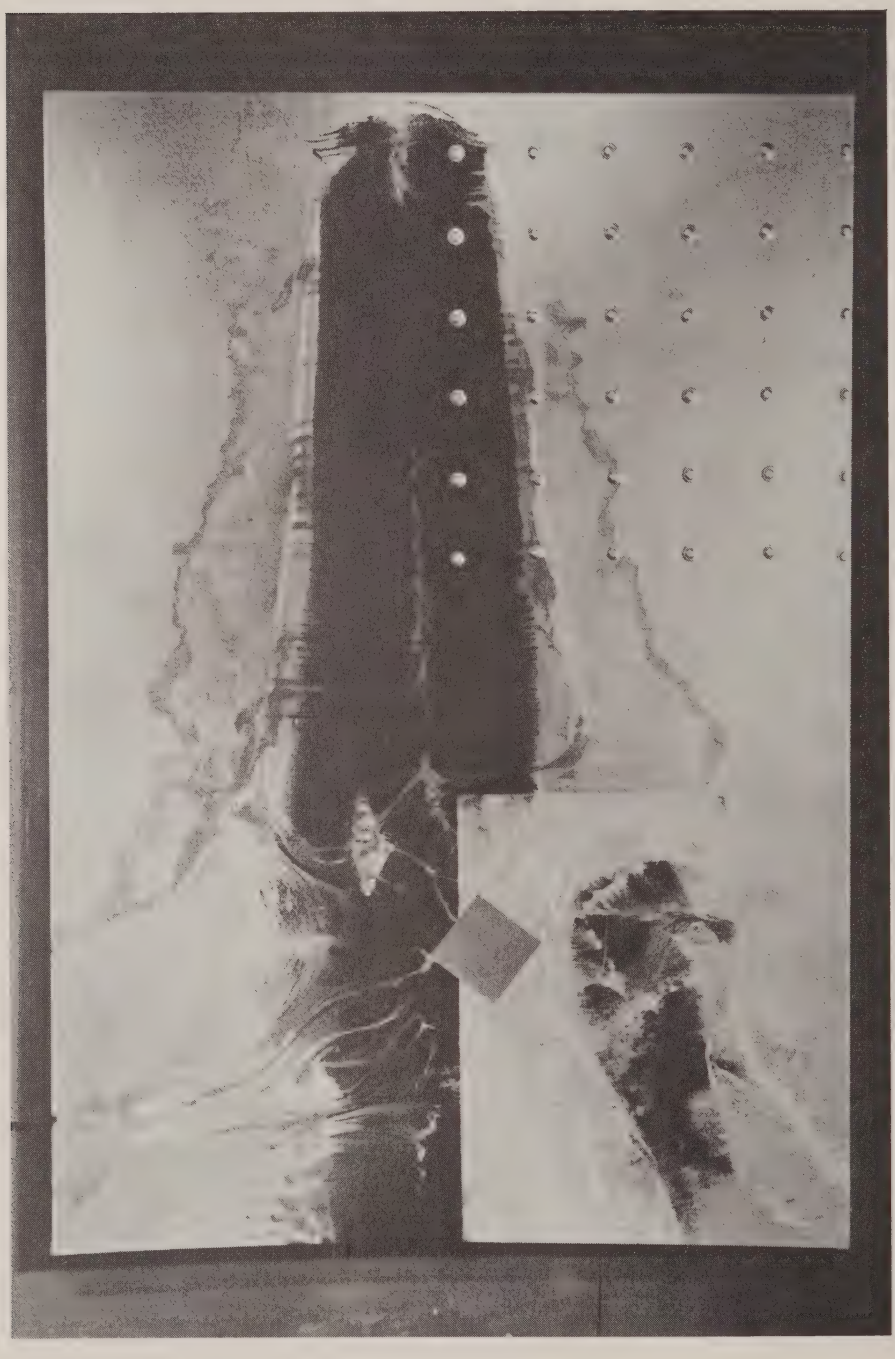
According to Saul, his work discloses its meaning to "those who love it."



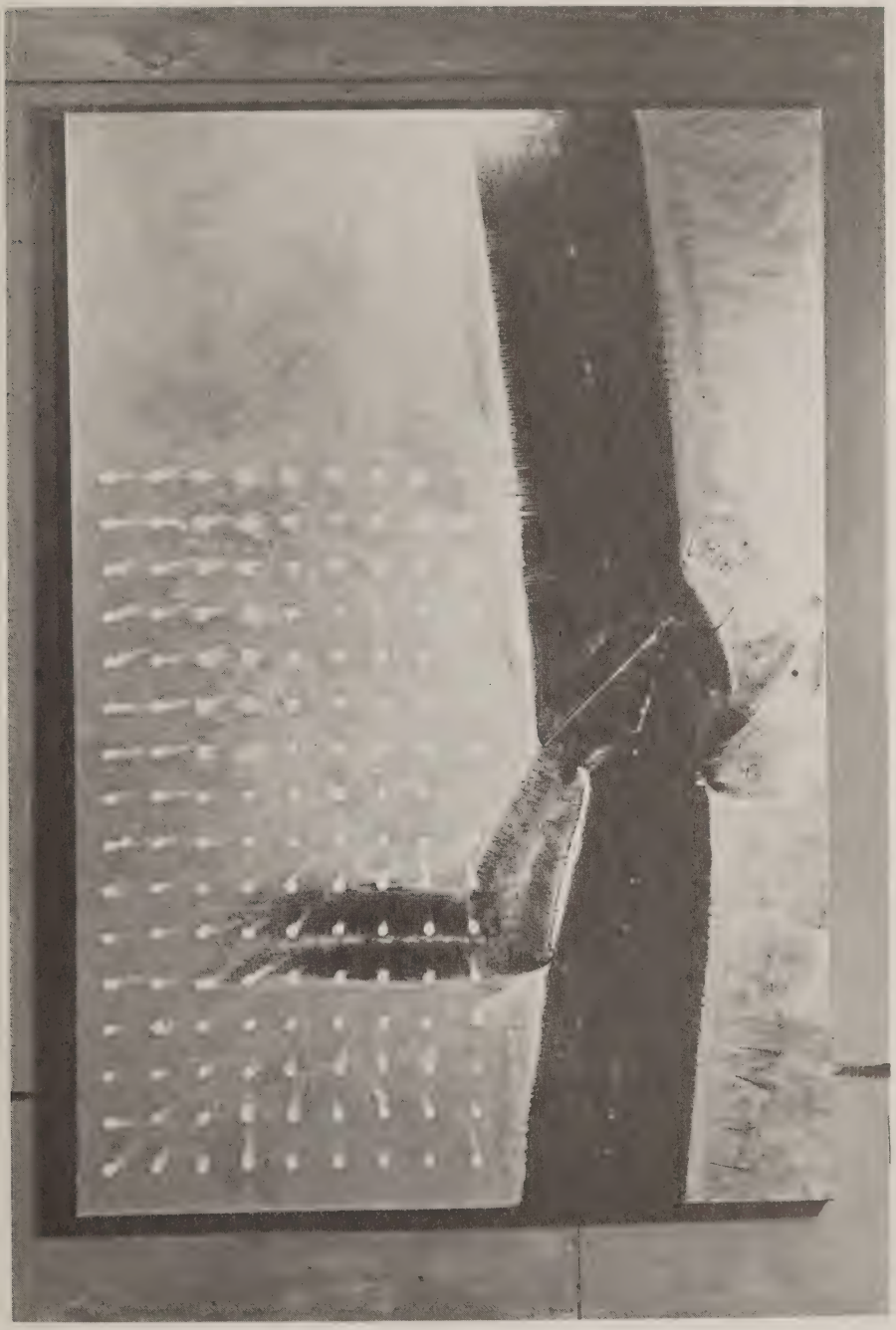
"No human being knows his path, nor the spheres through which he'll pass."



"There are to be found seventy crowned places," Saul explains painting,

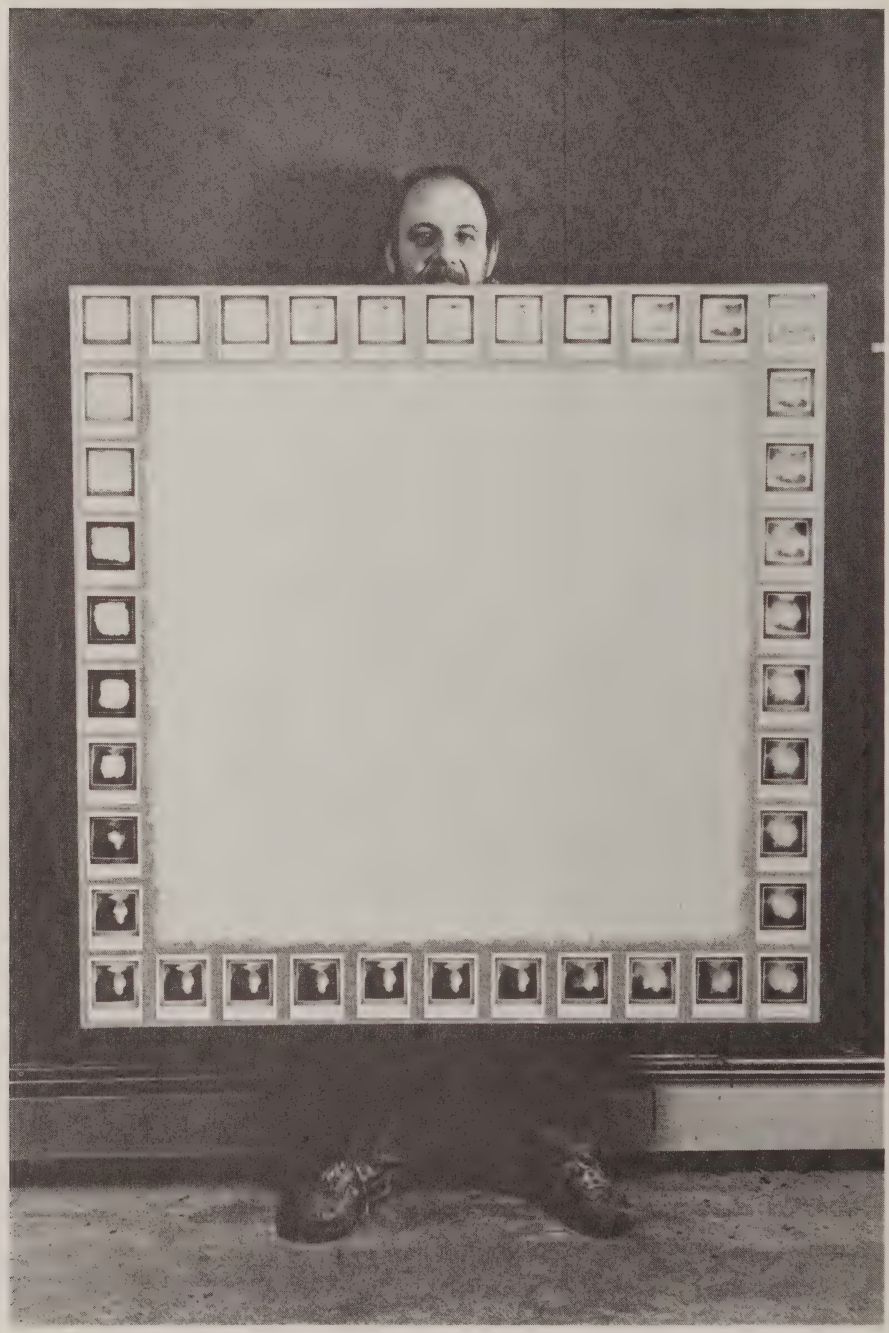


"and each place has doors to seventy worlds, and each opens to seventy



channels that open to seventy supernal crowns — all leading to the One."

"It requires an act of faith to believe the middle of this is a painting."



"It also requires faith to believe there are fifteen portraits of Chaplin."

# GEORGE NAKASHIMA: WOODWORKER

*George Nakashima wrote* The Soul Of A Tree — *A Woodworker's Reflections (available through Harper & Row, Publishers, $52) on someone else's suggestion, but is glad now that the book is out. It is a notably handsome volume, beautifully designed, photographed, and printed. It presents an honest and intimate portrait of an artisan who strives to find the ideal use for each plank of timber that comes to his hand. Nakashima desires to "create an object of utility to man and, if nature smiles, an object of lasting beauty." That he has succeeded in achieving his desires is attested by his world-famous tables, desks, chairs, and cabinets, some of which were made for the late Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Japanese-style house in New York, many of which now grace homes or places of worship around the world. He has a factory in Japan which produces versions of his creations there, but it is in his seven-building ten-acre compound on a hill above New Hope, Pennsylvania, that he lives and works. Showing us through the workrooms, he would pause in front of pieces of wood in various stages of finish, inspect what was being done, speak softly to the workman, perhaps draw a line on it with a nub of chalk out of his pocket.*

**FIP:** We didn't know of your connection with Sri Aurobindo until we read *The Soul Of A Tree.* That really took us by surprise.

**GEORGE:** That's how I started out, I guess, with Sri Aurobindo. The reason I am interested in your magazine is because it's sort of where I came in a good many years ago.

In the middle 1930's, I was in India. I spent two years designing and helping to construct the major building in Sri Aurobindo's ashram in Pondicherry. It was called Golconda. When I came back to this country before the war broke out, the teachings of Sri Aurobindo were the root of what we did here, the root of my thinking, actually the root of almost everything. I am quite a partisan of Sri Aurobindo.

**FIP:** Had you read and studied him before going to India?

**GEORGE:** Not really. I knew something about him, but very little. But when I got there, I became so engrossed with his teachings that I became a follower. He gave me a Sanskrit name — Sandarananda — "sandara" means "beauty" and "ananda" is "bliss" — so it translates roughly as "one who delights in beauty." I am a direct disciple of his. There are very few of us left now. We were last there in '73, and there were only twenty. There are probably fewer now. Back in the 'thirties, there were a couple thousand in the ashram, and Auroville was projected to hold about fifty thousand. Since Sri Aurobindo's

death and Mother's there have been — counting the Tamil villages — maybe only ten thousand people in the area. They're having a difficult time financially and otherwise. Mother died in '73. We saw her just about a week or so before she dropped all interviews. She died that fall, — I think, in November.

I think Sri Aurobindo was a tremendous person — by far the greatest man of the twentieth century and maybe the greatest of all time. And very few have heard of him much less know anything about him. There's no sense in proselytizing. His teachings are very abstruse.

You should read *Savitri*. It would be an experience for you. It's probably the greatest poem ever written. Shakespeare would be just a kind of high-school boy compared to Sri Aurobindo. He has tremendous scope. It's sort of a narrative poem based on Indian history.

The followers of Sri Aurobindo are rather limited, even in India. Of course, he has become a legendary person. But his teachings are difficult to popularize. There is no dogma, no ritual in the ashram at all except for some feast days — what are called "darshan days." There's nothing that pertains to any other religion. Each person was obliged to develop his own *sadhana* — that is, his own development — and was entitled to go about it any way he wanted. There was no supervision. And there was hardly anything in the day at the ashram that was routine excepting meals. There was an evening meditation, from about seven to seven-twenty, and even that was not obligatory.

**FIP:** Sri Aurobindo would speak to his followers and advise them?

**GEORGE:** There were no conversations of any kind. It was not considered necessary. But you could write to him, and he would almost always answer. He would spend great lengths of time answering the letters of people who asked help in their own development. Aside from that, there was really no contact. Everybody felt his presence very, very strongly. Very often he'd answer your questions before you wrote them. He had that quality.

Our contact was mostly with Mother, who was a remarkable French woman. Even seeing Mother, though, was a special occasion. The only time we had contact with Sri Aurobindo himself was on the "darshan days," when he would receive followers — give you a blessing.

I think everyone felt he was an avatar. He was a little bit Christ-like. I never saw him standing, but he wasn't a big man. We always saw him sitting. He went into retirement around 1924, I guess, and never left his room until he died, at seventy-five, in, I think, 1954.

There are several good books about him. One is called *An Ancient Consciousness* by Satprem, who was a French follower of his. But even he did not have direct contact with Sri Aurobindo. You have no idea how selective he was about seeing people. He wouldn't even see Gandhi because, by his lights, Gandhi was a politician and not a spiritual man. He did see Tagore, though, and, as I say, followers like me and others in the ashram.

**FIP:** He spoke English?

**GEORGE:** I think he was versed in most of the European languages before he was five or six — before he knew his own native tongue of Bengali. He was educated in England, you know, at King's College. He went back to India when he was a fairly young man. When he got interested in Hinduism, he finally learned the Indian languages. But he wrote in English. . . . Another book I would recommend, by the way, is *The Essential Aurobindo.* You can go on from that to almost anything. He wrote a regular library of books. The Library of Congress has eleven pages of listings for his writings. And there's a place up in Mt. Tremper, New York, called Matagiri, that handles the books.

**FIP:** When you look back at the 'thirties, George, what was it in Sri Aurobindo's message that most appealed to you?

**GEORGE:** Actually, his catholicity. He was such a broad man. And so gentle and unassertive. In the early 1920's, he was put in prison by the British and then acquitted. I don't know why they acquitted him because he was the leading spirit in the anti-British movement for Indian independence way before Gandhi. He is the father of Indian independence.

**FIP:** Someone told us you describe yourself as a Christian Buddhist. What do you call yourself?

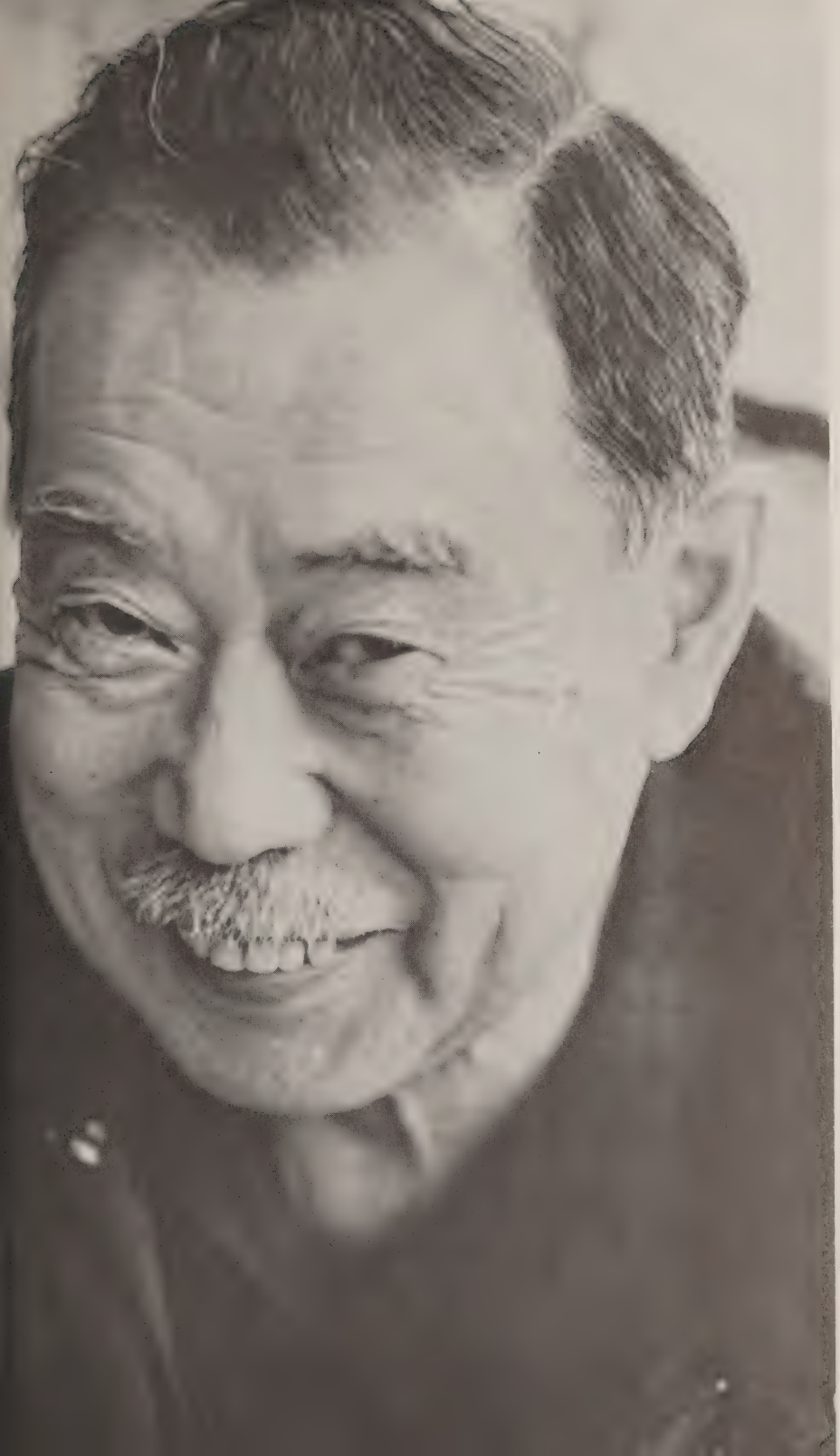
**GEORGE:** I'm a catholic Hindu! No, seriously, I would call myself an Aurobindist.

I was a Methodist for a while and a Baptist for a while and then I became very interested in Zen. Then I got discouraged about the West and started traveling. I traveled for seven years. I lived in Paris for a year. It was in the early 'thirties, when modern art was in flower, and I lived in that kind of atmosphere. I went to the Cafe du Dome and to Leo Stein's. I never met Gertrude. I met a lot of others. We used to have a very nice time every Sunday afternoon.

Along with my one year in Paris, I had five years in Japan and two years in India. I got very interested in Nietszche. I read him in French. I don't know German.

**FIP:** When you were in India, did you come into contact with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who's just moved to this country?

**GEORGE:** I've heard of him, but I don't know him. So many of these gurus have huge successes. One, when he first came to this country, used to come to see me, but now he's gotten so successful that I never see him. Last I heard, he's up in Connecticut. He has a big center there, half a dozen others around the country, and half a dozen more in Europe — that sort of thing. I believe he even owns an office building in New York City. He's a bigtime operator. And people like Maharishi, of course. They're not big in the long run. A lot of it is very commercial. But I think most of them are very sincere — like Norman



Vincent Peale or Billy Graham.

**FIP:** In your book you mention doing a church with your daughter, who is an architect.

**GEORGE:** Yes, a Catholic church, with my daughter and son-in-law. I've done furniture for a good many, but never any churches around. I did do a little monastery in New Mexico, where George O'Keefe lives, and one in San Miguel, in Mexico.

I do feel that a mood and a physical environment are very important — that if there's any sort of transformation in our lives, we have to start with our environment.

At this point, I'm very disappointed in modern art. It has become completely egotistic, it has no roots, no quality, no beauty, so you might as well write off the whole scene. Which I have done. We have gone underground — gone back in that little hill there and holed in.

**FIP:** Would you say you have a kind of ashram here of your own?

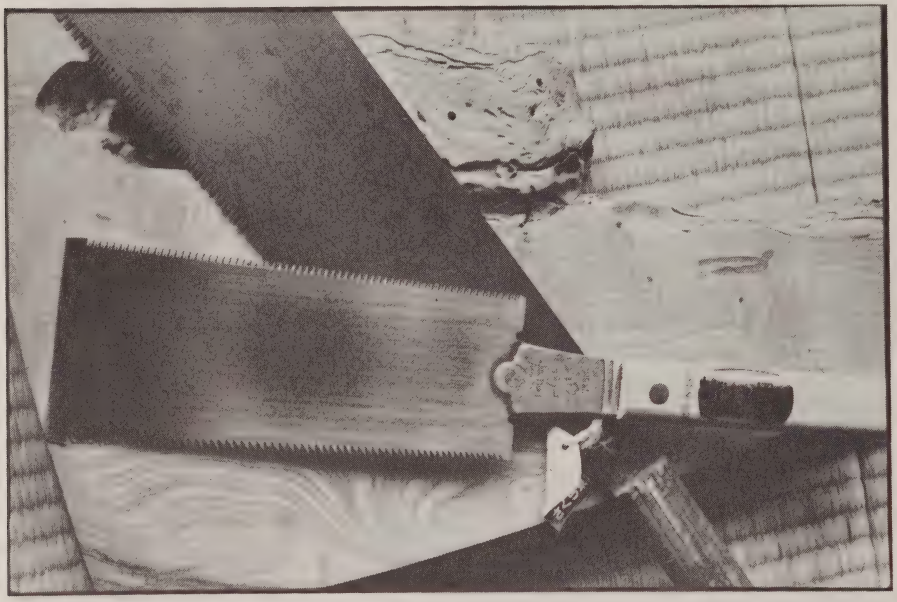
**GEORGE:** Not really. But something like one. There's interest that way — people who would like to be taken in. I think there are two movements now among the youth. One is the assertiveness kick and the other is to soften, to give within. I think the assertiveness is destroying our civilization. I don't think it has long to go.

**FIP:** I hope you're wrong.

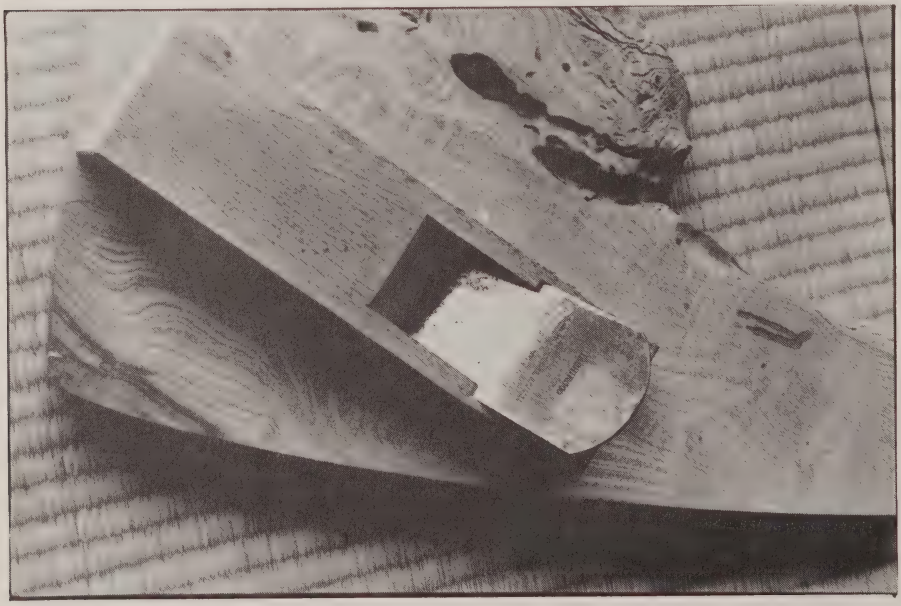
**GEORGE:** I think we need it. The flowers started blooming in Hiroshima about two months after the bomb fell, you know. I think life will continue, and probably be a lot better than we have now. A lot of people have this view. I think it's in human nature to purge itself. A benevolent destruction — it's happened so many times in our history, and we always come out better. This civilization is not the final civilization, and our man is not the final man.

George Nakashima at work. At right and on the pages that follow are photographs of this reticent and self-effacing artist while he pursues the art to which he has dedicated himself. If there are challenges to the woodworker, there are few who have captured, identified with, and consummated the relationship with more expression — and success — than George.

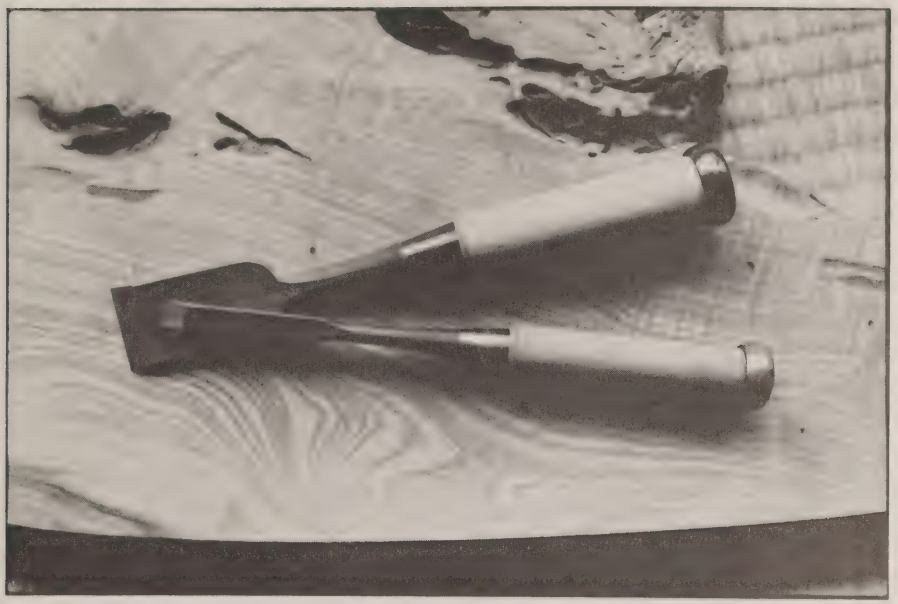
The Japanese saws are themselves reflections of an ancient noble tradition.



No tool gives Nakashima a better feeling of his element than the plane.



Standard Japanese chisels with very hard steel cutting edges are the best.



This special Japanese saw — called an azi-biki-noko — allows middle cuts.

# From 'THE SOUL OF A TREE' by George Nakashima

**AS A BOY,** I enjoyed roaming the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. Higher and higher I climbed, passing the great Douglas firs which punctured the heavens. Exploring along the way, I would follow the river beds or the railway tracks until the trees ended — at the timberline. . . .

On these climbs, I had an irresistible yearning to explore the next pass, to see what lay on the other side of the mountain, to gaze at new vistas. Crossing meadows of mountain flowers, I would stop to talk to the stunted bonsai-like evergreens which clung to life in the harsh environment, sometimes rooted only to a crevice in a rock. . . .

Near the timberline grows a species of blueberry, the bush perhaps no taller than the width of two hands. On these plants grow huge, dark berries, juicy and delicious. To me these were *prasad*, the Sanskrit word for the food of the gods. Strangely, when exhausted from a day's climb and unable to go one step further, I would always seem to find this friendly berry. . . .

**JUST WHAT DREW ME TO PARIS,** I don't quite remember. . . . Having decided to stay in Paris for a year, I divided my resources, which amounted to two hundred dollars, into twelve parts. This meant I could spend sixteen dollars per month, half for rent, half for other expenses.

I visited Chartres many times, always reveling in its construction and beauty, and marveling at the delicacy of its design and the glory of its glass. That so much greatness could have been achieved by the citizenry of the small town of Chartres staggers the imagination. Here was a testament to the deep yearning of the human spirit. Mont Saint-Michel, built and rebuilt from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, also represented for me a glory that our present age with all its vast technology cannot equal. I can imagine a community joined by faith building these great monuments. I can visualize the butcher and baker working side by side with the stonecutter, while the duchess would be helping push the stone cart. . . .

At the time I had a strong feeling that an era in Paris was dying. To my mind, the hectic activity in the arts, literature, music, and architecture represented not truth but a game — one to be played out, but one which, rootless, eventually would die.

**I FOUND JAPAN** a dramatic change. . . . We traveled a good deal. We took trips to Kyoto, the ancient capital, to enjoy the shrines and temples, fabulously built wooden structures expressing the beauty and

eternal quality of the island people of Japan, and the deep reverence these people have for nature, the sweet sadness of never breaking the bonds of Nirvana. Also, in Nara, at Hakone, and in Ise, we experienced the in-dwelling of the Japanese spirit.

**I ARRIVED** at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India, quite early in the morning. Here I was received warmly by the Mother, Mira, and members of the ashram. It was not long before I slipped into the routine of the simple life led there. The monklike life was beautiful and unadorned. . . . I participated in the life there during its golden age, when all of the disciples were in close touch with both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It was, in a way, an ideal existence on earth, without a trace of rancor or harsh words, arguments, egotism, but with all in concert in search of a divine consciousness. But outside the ashram there was difficulty in the air. Japan had already invaded China by 1939. It became for me a question of living a life of great beauty in isolation, or of going out again into the world.

**FORTUNATELY**, Antonin Raymond, for whom I had worked in Tokyo, owned a farm in Pennsylvania. He invited my family to join him there. This was our start in New Hope. . . .

Our land in Bucks County, surrounded by rolling hills, hardwood forests, and farms interspersed with fine stone houses built by the English Quakers, has become the core of our existence. Our property enabled us to test my concepts of decentralization, intermediate technology, and living off the land. . . . We have managed to bypass the whole money system, having never had a mortgage and practically nothing in the way of loans.

**THE TREE** and its pith live on. Its fruits feed us. Its branches shade and protect us. And finally, when time and weather bring it down, its body offers timber for our houses and boards for our furniture. The tree lives on.

**AT TIMES**, I felt it unjust that all the wild birds in my woods could sing all day long while I sweated in a craft the world didn't seem ready for.

**WE ARE ON THE VERGE** of a great and heroic revolution — a revolution of the soul.

From THE SOUL OF A TREE by George Nakashima. ©Copyright 1981 by Kodansha International Ltd. Published by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, New York.

A large Ben Shahn mural decorates exterior of Nakashima's New Hope museum.

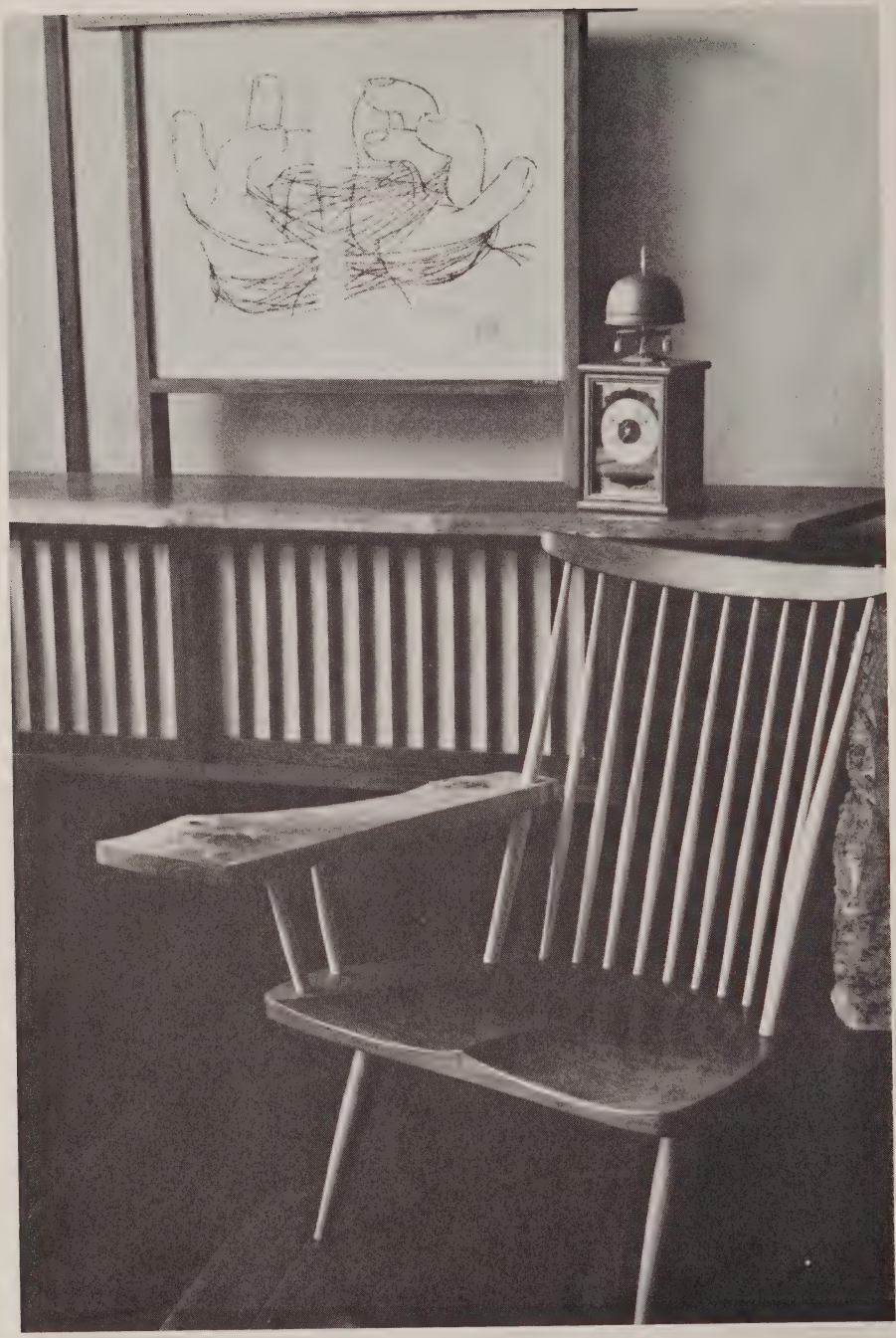
Entrance to museum of artifacts and woods is both oriental and modern.

Slippers waiting for visitors on the unscarred floor of Nakashima's studio.

The studio from another angle shows stool, coffeetable, lamp, slab bench.

The ultra simplicity of a teapot on a tatami-ed corner of Nakashima's studio

contrasts with intricate hemp-leaf pattern (in background) also present.



The Conoid chair is a Nakashima trademark, enhanced by Shahn drawing above.

FELLOWSHIP IN

# PRAYER

## 12 MONTHLY ISSUES $12

☑ **YES!** Start my subscription for 12 monthly issues of *Fellowship in Prayer* for the low rate of just $12. Include my FREE copy of REPORT ON HOLISTIC HEALTH.

Name ☐ Mr. ☐ Mrs. ☐ Ms. _____

Address _____ Apt _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

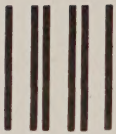
☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me ☐ Renewal

**FREE** for new subscribers and renewals: *REPORT ON HOLISTIC HEALTH.* 56 pages of interviews with individuals on how they found the way toward integration of body, mind, and spirit.

**MAIL THIS CARD TODAY—POSTAGE IS PAID**

Your first issue will arrive in 3 to 6 weeks. Watch for it.

**IDEAL GIFTS for...**
**Birthdays**
**Holidays**
**Graduation**
**Libraries**
**Students**



NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

# BUSINESS REPLY CARD

FIRST CLASS PERMIT NO. 175 PRINCETON, NJ

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE


FELLOWSHIP IN

# PRAYER

20 Nassau Street Suite 250 East
Princeton, NJ 08540

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER, INC.
20 Nassau Street, Suite 250 East
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
(609) 924-0880

Carl Allison Evans (1880-1956) Founder

Trustees

Kathryn G. Brown, President
James T.C. Liu, Vice President
Samuel M. Silver, Vice President
Emily Sargent Councilman
Paul Griffith, Editor
Nirbha Singh Khalsa
Herrymon Maurer
Gloria Merchant
Reuben L. Musey, President Emeritus
Edwiene Schmitt
Mary Yiu

Joy Reynolds, Executive Secretary
F. Samuel Brainard, Treasurer

Advisors & Contributing Editors

Masao Abe (Japan)
Ray Allen Albert (Virginia)
Velta Myrle Allen (California)
Elizabeth Barjou (New York)
Joy Bergman (New York)
Dennis Barry Carroll (Maryland)
Emilie, Lady Coote (England)
Zelma S. Dennis (California)
Georga Palmer Dishner (Tennessee)
Marion H. Freeman (Massachusetts)
Sam Hamod (D.C.)
Nixeon Civille Handy (Washington)
Catherine C. Houck (Pennsylvania)
William LaFleur (California)
Georgiana Lieder Lahr (Florida)
Hsuan-min Liu (China)
Georgia S. Marin (New Hampshire)
Emma S. McLaughlin (Pennsylvania)
Elizabeth O. Moses (New York)
Sr. Miriam Murphy (New Jersey)
Mrs. Reuben L. Musey (Maryland)
Mrs. Charles Oakes (North Carolina)
Carla Patsuris (New York)
Marion J. Richardson (New York)
Swami Ritajananda (France)
Margaret Ruth Thomas (New Jersey)
Samuel Ubani (Nigeria)
Dr. Teh-yao Wu (Singapore)

Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

ARTISTS & THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES is a special issue of Fellowship in Prayer's monthly publication. For further information and subscription rates, write to the address below or phone (609) 924-0880.

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER
20 NASSAU STREET – SUITE 250 EAST
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-Profit
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Hopewell, N.J.
Permit No. 22